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AUTHOR Ciampa, Bartholomew J.
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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews recent literature pertaining to the liberal arts and general education curricula in higher education institutions today. The author suggests the establishment of a new liberal art that uses the principle of indifference to combine recognition of the familiar with the discovery of the new. However, instead of the formation of a single new liberal art, 4 new liberal arts are in evidence of formation today. These mark points at which existing liberal arts have become impertinent to problem, and at which they have uncovered facets of those problems to which such new liberal arts must be adapted. These new arts are the structure of disciplines as a structure of facts, the methods of inquiry and proof, and systems of knowledge and action. (Author/HS)

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# The Liberal Arts and General Education: A Perspective

by

Bartholomew J. Ciampa, Ph.D.
Director of Teacher Training
Nasson College
Springvale, Maine

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Although student criticism during recent years has had a marked effect upon higher education, criticism from within higher education itself may be more devastating and indeed more telling in the last analysis.[1] There is also the feeling that some have finally become concerned about the unplanned, mindless explosion of growth which may very well serve to destroy the institutions and also that these critics within higher education have shown that colleges fail because neither curricula nor style of teaching had much effect on the lives of students.[2]

There is also the feeling that colleges should be adaptive to changes which are self-generating; they must be adaptive to their surroundings and their times, and that because of the pressures upon the colleges to serve both history and the present we have tried to produce "educated" people by "inflicting" a well-rounded curriculum on the undergraduates.[3]

This contention is supported by Lloyd J. Averill as he states that there exists an embarrassingly large number of liberal arts graduates who could not, in any event, be called liberally educated. Just because a student is introduced to the several areas of the curriculum, this does not mean that he has been liberally educated. Instead of requiring a minimal depth of study in four divisions, perhaps a wiser approach would be to allow the student to choose three out of the four and pursue them to greater comprehension.[4]

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[1]Lewis B. Mayhew, "And Now the Future," in Twenty-Five Years: 1945 - 1970, edited by G. Kerry Smith (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1970), p. 310.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Martin B. Loeb, "How Can The Undergraduate College Introduce Innovations and Effect New Developments which Reflect Present and Future Responsibilities Without Destroying Institutional Balance," in Current Issues in Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: Association for Higher Education, 1964), p. 65.

[4]Lloyd Averill, "Viability of the Liberal Arts," in Twenty-Five Years: 1945 - 1970, edited by G. Kerry Smith (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1970), p. 165-167.

The concreteness of the modern world and its reliance upon fact call for the establishment of a new liberal art which uses the principle of indifference to combine recognition of the familiar with the discovery of the new. Although this seems to be a simple objective, it seems to have been transformed into the age old controversy between tradition and innovation. This new liberal art should combine increased individual spontaneity with the increased complexity of the environment as opposed to divisive systematization.[5]

Instead of the formation of a single new liberal art, four "new" liberal arts are in evidence of formation today. These mark points at which existing liberal arts have become impertinent to problems, and at which they have uncovered facets of those problems to which such new liberal arts must be adapted. These new "arts" are: (a) The structure of disciplines as a structure of facts; (b) The structure of disciplines as a structure of interpretations and experiences; (c) The structure of disciplines as a structure of methods of inquiry and proof; (d) The structure of disciplines as a structure of systems of knowledge and action.[6]

Brown and Mayhew state that some of the problems that currently face the privately supported liberal arts college are caused because these colleges had their roots in the refusal of the Colonial and post-Revolutionary institutions to adjust to the changing needs of society.[7]

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[5]Richard P. McKeon, "Future of Liberal Arts," in Twenty-Five Years: 1945 - 1970, edited by G. Kerry Smith (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1970) p. 174-182.

[6]Richard P. McKeon, "The Future of The Liberal Arts," in Current Issues in Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: Association for Higher Education, 1964), p. 38-43.

[7]Hugh S. Brown and Lewis B. Mayhew, American Higher Education (New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1965), p. 22.

DeVane suggests that another cause of current problems may be attributed to the fact that most excellent and poor colleges have the common characteristic that neither has often has been willing to engage in bold educational experiments whether because of inherent conservatism, sheer complacency, lack of imaginative leadership, or lack of material resources.[8]

Such blind conservatism, as Bruce Deering explains, is an obstacle to the maintenance of academic excellence. Student bodies as well as faculties are resistant to change and innovation. This is distressing in that colleges which should be taking the lead in innovating are lagging far behind the military and industry in this regard. Efficiency should not be feared but should be utilized, it is felt, to lead to better teaching with less effort for more people.[9]

An implication that seems to arise is that curricular change can be integrating and unifying or dislocating depending upon the factors of whether it was anticipated and creatively utilized or resisted and accepted reluctantly.[10]

In this regard Corson suggests that faculty members dealing with the professions or the liberal arts tend to suspect change that is put forth by groups that are external to either the institution or to their discipline or profession.[11] Changes in courses or curricula to account for developments

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[8]William C. DeVane, "The College of Liberal Arts," in The Contemporary University: U.S.A., edited by Robert S. Morison (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1964), p. 5.

[9]Bruce Deering, "Abuses in Undergraduate Teaching," in Twenty-Five Years: 1945-1970, edited by G. Kerry Smith (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1970), p. 223.

[10]Paul L. Dressel and Frances H. DeLisle, Undergraduate Curriculum Trends (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1969), p. 1.

[11]John J. Corson, The Governance of Colleges and Universities (New York: McGraw - Hill Book Co., 1960), p. 173.

within society are often viewed by faculties as a sacrifice of traditional values until such changes are adopted by prestige institutions. These faculties, since they concentrate primarily upon their own subject areas, rarely concern themselves with educational problems of a broader perspective.[12] This practice often gives rise to institutional or course irrelevance.

This irrelevance of higher education, as David B. Truman notes, rests upon the structure (or non-structure) of the curriculum. It should be constructed around a system of priorities, which are designed and operated by a collaborative effort. What is labeled a curriculum actually resembles a kaleidoscope which is seen as largely due to chance because a consistent design is absent from the whole. Each segment of the curriculum is dealt with in relative isolation as only a partial coherence may be imposed by departments or by disciplines. Since these are still only slightly larger fragments, they provide no collective means of achieving the collective goals of the liberal arts.[13]

Another cause of irrelevance put forth by Martin Tarcher is that higher education does not perform its function as society's instrument for continuous, constructive self-criticism and social change. This is also seen as being caused by the fragmented nature of the curriculum which could be eliminated by building curricular areas not around disciplines but around questions and around problems.[14]

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[12]John J. Corson, The Governance of Colleges and Universities (New York: McGraw - Hill Book Co., 1960), p. 174.

[13]David B. Truman, "Relevance of Liberal Arts," in Twenty-Five Years: 1945 - 1970, edited by G. Kerry Smith (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., '70), p. 252-253.

[14]Martin Tarcher, "Learning Through Involvement," in Twenty-Five Years: 1945-1970, edited by G. Kerry Smith (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1970), p. 278-279.

The liberal arts college is essentially a method of advanced general education[15] and its curriculum is its key institutional means toward fulfilling its goals.[16]

The colleges' goals and curricular trends are very often obscured because of the diversity and autonomy of these institutions and the fact that they are at varying developmental stages as a result of each unique historical origin, evolution, and locale.[17]

These factors, in combination, tend to affect the significance of the undergraduate liberal arts education with respect to the individual students. The importance of this result is emphasized by Nason as he states that undergraduate education which is liberal and significant must speak to the conditions which are of the most concern to the students.[18]

More general still is the suggestion by Paul Dressel that a sociological statement be made which relates the curriculum to the needs of society and to the needs of the individuals in the society.[19]

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[15]Lewis B. Mayhew, The Smaller Liberal Arts College (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1962), p. 50.

[16]Joseph Axelrod, "The Undergraduate Curriculum and Institutional Goals: An Exploration of Means and Ends," in Current Issues in Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: Association for Higher Education, 1964), p. 126.

[17]Dressel and DeLisle, Undergraduate Curriculum Trends, p. 2.

[18]John W. Nason, "American Higher Education in 1980: Some Basic Issues," in Higher Education in the Revolutionary Decades edited by Lewis B. Mayhew (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1967), p. 405.

[19]Paul L. Dressel, "A Look at New Curriculum Models for Undergraduate Education," in Current Issues in Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: Association for Higher Education, 1964), p. 145.

Some difference of opinion is in evidence with respect to the direction the liberal arts should take to dissipate its irrelevance.

McKeon feels that today's liberal arts are adaptations of the nineteenth century higher education which are modified by omitting some of the skills once taught and by adding a broader scope to be studied. The arts thus modified are better suited to acquaint men with problems than to provide them with means for understanding or action. The irrelevance of the liberal arts will not be remedied by a return to earlier forms of the liberal arts.[20]

On the other hand, Kirk feels that a very powerful defense of the liberal arts college can be made if it returns to the performance of old duties and if it resumes its original functions.[21] Thus returning to a concise curriculum emphasizing classical literature, languages, moral philosophy, history, and pure sciences, logic, rhetoric, and religious knowledge.[22]

Another issue of long standing has been the question of balance within the curriculum with respect to liberal and general education in relation to specialization.

Few disagree with the obvious merits of each component but, by the same token, many disagree when a subjective determination of balance is made.[23]

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[20]McKeon, "The Future of the Liberal Arts," p. 37.

[21]Russell Kirk, "American Colleges: A Proposal for Reform," in Higher Education in the Revolutionary Decades edited by Lewis B. Mayhew (Berkeley, Calif: McCutchan Pub. Corp., 1967), p. 106-107.

[22]Ibid., p. 111.

[23]Dressel and DeLisle, Undergraduate Curriculum Trends, p. 4.

On this point Clarence H. Faust is of the mind that there is a complete lack of communication between proponents of these two philosophies since they begin with separate assumptions and reach opposed conclusions.[24] Consequently, while the controversy continues over these two ideologies less progress is made in coming to grips with the urgent educational questions of our time. An attempt must be to made to uncover and thoroughly analyze these basic questions, to think them through toward acquiring more information with respect to the relationship of specialized training and liberal arts.[25] The solution will be in an agreement as to what "proper" balance and articulation between the two emphases is.[26]

The knowledge explosion has also played a major role in the evolution of current programs as also have been the societal needs of the United States, the ecological pressures on the environment, student demand, and the demand for increased technological competencies.[27] As a result of these pressures, courses and curricula must constantly undergo scrutiny toward their updating to guard against their becoming obsolete. The resulting dilemma is in the assigning of the interrelation of and the priorities according to the various phases of college and university functions.[28]

As a result of the vast knowledge explosion, DeVane also feels that it is the primary task for all liberal arts colleges to rethink and reconstruct the

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[24]Clarence H. Faust, "Specialization and Liberal Arts," in Twenty-Five Years: 1945-1970, edited by G. Kerry Smith (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1970), p. 49-50.

[25]Ibid., p. 51.

[26]Dressel and DeLisle, Undergraduate Curriculum Trends, p. 4.

[27]Ibid., p. 5.

[28]Ibid.

curriculum. He states that the danger in the older, mainly verbal education is a loss of vitality and relevance which may lead to stagnation. The danger in new developments, mainly mathematical and scientific, may be in the possibility of overwhelming the old and creating a new imbalance.[29] He sees that the conventional form of education at the college level must be renovated and enlarged if the whole concept is to be saved. A balanced curriculum, fair to both old and new, must be designed which must include the older liberating studies along with the necessary bases of academic thought.[30]

More generally, there exists the need for a redefinition and balancing of common experience, breadth, and depth in the curriculum within both general education and particular majors since it is not, at present, adequately defined and specified.[31]

Dressel and Lorimer observe that over a number of years haphazard development of an institution may result in a dissonance between traditional purposes and the actual educational program. Several colleges have been concerned with the proper relationship between liberal and specialized education. Certain value judgments which require the clarification of philosophy and policy determination should be made by the faculty.[32]

On this same point, Clark Kerr sees the balance in the curriculum as ever-changing. He feels that the essence of curricular balance is to match support

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[29]DeVane, "The College of Liberal Arts," p. 9.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Dressel, "A Look at New Curriculum Models for Undergraduate Education," p. 143.

[32]Paul L. Dressel and Margaret F. Lorimer, "Institutional Self Evaluation," in Evaluation in Higher Education by Paul Dressel and Associates (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 397.

with the intellectual creativity of subject fields; with the needs for the highest level of skill; with the requisite of expert service to current society. Balance within the curriculum, he notes, requires a shifting set of judgments relating facilities and attention to the possibilities inherent in each field, while preserving the essential integrity of all fields. Consequently, the only decision that can be made, he goes on, is that it would be a mistake to preserve today's balance in the curriculum for tomorrow's world.[33]

At about the same time, Loeb reinforces Kerr's opinion by remarking that institutional balance should not be a matter of keeping one side down to make both sides even. It may require looking for a reorganization of traditional departments or by using techniques to bring out the strengths that have been hitherto hidden. But balance is not necessarily a useful criterion; we need to find ways of maintaining an adaptive organization alert to the problems of the past and present, and the probabilities of the future.[34]

In order to solve the problem of balance within the curriculum, Dressel made an early attempt to develop a statement of principles that govern the development of undergraduate curriculums. These principles are aimed at minimizing the distinction between liberal and vocational programs; by restricting the range of courses offered; by encouraging more qualitative student and faculty planning and advising; and by suggesting budgetary and administrative procedures which will reinforce the curricular principles.[35]

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[33]Clark Kerr, "The Frantic Race to Remain Contemporary," in The Contemporary University: U.S.A. edited by Robert S. Morison (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1966), p. 26-27.

[34]Loeb, "How Can Undergraduate College Introduce Innovations and Effect Developments which Reflect Present and Future Responsibilities Without Destroying Institutional Balance," p. 65.

[35]Paul L. Dressel, The Undergraduate Curriculum in Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: the Center of Applied Research in Educ., Inc., 1963), p. 90-91.

At a relatively much later date Lewis Mayhew somewhat paraphrases Dressel when he comments that in order to realize the proper balance between breadth and depth of curriculum, the college or university may find it advisable to modify its present courses in government, literature, or art, to be presented in a comparative manner. He states further that in order to bring about a new strategy for liberal learning we must recognize that area knowledge, language competence, and a sophisticated sense of how the world works will be required.[36]

In a statement directly related to curricular balance Russel Kirk specifies that the liberal arts college should abandon specialized and professional studies which should be solely found at the graduate schools of universities.[37] Mayhew's much earlier statement to the effect that since no one during the undergraduate years can presume to study all or even a majority of the aspects of a complicated subject, students should be required to concentrate on but a relatively few courses at a time, seemed to be of the same bent.[38]

Dressel's early statement with respect to finding a way of merging liberal and professional training which maintains the essential elements of a liberal education while providing at least minimal competency for entry into some vocation[39] is restated by Kirk three years later but in a manner that leaves no room for doubt. Kirk emphasized that the liberal arts college should turn away from vocationalism and other areas of training that colleges were never meant to undertake.[40]

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[36]Lewis B. Mayhew, Higher Education in the Revolutionary Decades (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan Publishing Corp, 1967), p. 393-394.

[37]Kirk, "American Colleges: A Proposal for Reform," p. 111.

[38]Mayhew, The Smaller Liberal Arts College, p. 50-51.

[39]Dressel, "A Look at New Curriculum Models for Undergraduate Educ.," p. 143.

[40]Kirk, "American College: A Proposal for Reform," p. 111.

A somewhat earlier statement from an administrative perspective was put forth by John Corson when he noted that the administrator's task of ensuring balanced curricular offerings is often thwarted because of the personal research interest of professors. Such interests usually result in the inclusion of a course in the department's offerings. A collection of these courses may not serve the students' best interests in terms of providing them with a greater grasp of the world's knowledge.[41]

Many times curricular imbalance may result from faculty misperceptions with respect to graduate school demands on the one hand and increased course diversification of the secondary schools on the other.

Mayhew is of the opinion that the undergraduate college need not concern itself unduly with the prerequisites for graduate education[42] while in the same regard, Michael feels that the college should understand and evaluate the curriculum pressures it is exerting upon the secondary school.[43]

DeVane is also aware of these pressures as he notes that he sees colleges as being pressured from below by the improved instruction on the high school level because of advanced credit courses, and from above by the strong trend toward early specialization that is being demanded by the graduate and professional schools.[44] As a result, Michael suggests that secondary schools should

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[41]Corson, The Governances of Colleges and Universities, p. 150.

[42]Mayhew, The Smaller Liberal Arts College, p. 52.

[43]Michael, "How Can the Undergraduate College Best Meet Curricular Pressures from Graduate and Professional Schools and from New Developments in Secondary Education," in Current Issues in Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: Association for Higher Education, 1964), p. 75.

[44]DeVane, "The College of Liberal Arts," p. 12.

withstand efforts of colleges to increase course specialization. They should also oppose trends to employ hidden entrance requirements.[45]

The strong trend towards early specialization in pre-professional courses in the programs of the upper years and the success of the advanced standing movement threaten to drive out the liberal studies that make for perspective and maturity.[46] Between these two pressures, the traditional liberal arts college's nature may be drastically altered at the cost of the liberal studies.[47]

Michael observes that better school-college articulation is needed because many college faculties know little about experimentation and changes that are found in the secondary school.[48] The college can promote some kind of curriculum continuity by working with schools that send students to them.[49] Since the work of scholars is essential to the development of new curriculum content, colleges can help the secondary schools by providing consultants to help in the process of curriculum revision.[50]

Our most urgent educational problem, specifies DeVane, is that of designing a curriculum and a structure for the liberal arts college which will make it an

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[45]Michael, "How Can the Undergraduate College Best Meet Curricular Pressures from Graduate and Professional Schools and from New Developments in Secondary Education," p. 75.

[46]William C. DeVane, Higher Education in Twentieth-Century America (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 146.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Michael, "How Can the Undergraduate College Best Meet Curricular Pressures from Graduate and Professional Schools and from New Developments in Secondary Education," p. 74.

[49]Ibid., p. 76.

[50]Ibid.

organic part of our entire system of education. At present each component part seems to be going its separate way; the high school toward its concept of a mass literate democracy; the college of liberal arts torn between general education and early specialization; and the graduate and professional schools moving towards complete specialization and vocationalism.[51]

General education, itself, was a response to four problems created by institutions of higher learning, suggests Stanley Idzerda.[52] The first is the "intellectual smorgasbord" of the free elective system which gives no assurance to educational balance since (second) vocational offerings are just about as common on small liberal arts college campuses as elsewhere. Thirdly, there exists the assumption that each student is being prepared to pursue a specialty in graduate school and must be narrowed into a specialized major field. Finally, the social composition of the campus is being changed by the comprehensive urban public high school which is sending enormous numbers of students on to college. As a result of these responses, courses were lumped together under the heading of general education, survey courses were instituted which gave students a "smattering" of knowledge in several dissociated fields, perhaps a result was not a broader curriculum but a "flabbier" one.[53]

A justification of the tendency for college course proliferation, observe Brown and Mayhew, is that the secondary schools discovered general education and began offering courses similar to those once offered on the college level.[54]

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[51]DeVane, "The College of Liberal Arts," p. 3.

[52]Stanley Idzerda, "Academic Rigor," in Twenty-Five Years: 1945-1970, edited by G. Kerry Smith (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1970), p. 105.

[53]Ibid., p. 106-108

[54]Brown and Mayhew, American Higher Education, p. 51.

Consequently, the undergraduate curriculum is becoming increasingly confused, and, while a reduction in course offerings is being sought by many theorists, many prestigious institutions, while rendering it somewhat impotent by emphasizing the election of courses and variety in course content.[55] Rees, by the same token, feels that extensive high school preparation provides colleges with the opportunity of erasing the courses that do not take advantage of the students' preparation.[56]

In an attempt to stress educational rigor, the standard curriculum - course has been made difficult, to be sure, but this emphasis has not been carefully thought out. All too often it is a mindless reaction to public or official criticism.[57] This notion is stressed by Dressel and DeLisle since they are of the opinion that most educational ideas are not new except for a particular institution in the process of adopting a change.[58] Much of what is termed as innovation is merely the careless adoption of a fad and should be more aptly termed renovation. Consequently, innovation, in the true sense of the word, can come about only when ideas, practices, and programs are organized in new and creative manners, into some sort of coherent "whole" which facilitates student learning.[59] This sort of fundamental change is rare.[60]

These views are reinforced by Rothwell who felt that there was a danger to the liberal arts on the social level with respect to a rush toward conformity,

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[55]Brown and Mayhew, American Higher Education, p. 51-52.

[56]Mina Rees, "How Can the Undergraduate College Best Meet Curricular Pressures from Graduate and Professional Schools and from New Developments in Secondary Education," in Current Issues in Higher Educ. (Washington, D.C.: Association for Higher Education, 1964), p. 71.

[57]Idzerda, "Academic Rigor," p. 109-110

[58]Dressel and DeLisle, "Undergraduate Curriculum Trends," p. 2.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid.

which marks our relatively comfortable society. There are few exceptions to the trend toward mass judgments.[61] In the same vein, Thackrey feels that we should develop a more discriminating, reflective, and scholarly attitude toward the establishment, expansion, and function of our colleges; a "look before you leap" attitude.[62]

Logan Wilson feels that many of our institutions are trying to do too many things.[63] Even in the single purpose liberal arts college there are often no applied criteria for judging teaching performance. The curriculum is, in almost all cases, a product of historic accretion rather than a product of contemporary design. New courses are added carelessly and virtually nothing is discarded.[64] Although bureaus or offices of institutional research already exist on a number of campuses, this type of organized inquiry is still generally the exception rather than the rule. On every campus, more of our best academicians ought to concern themselves with basic questions of form and function in higher education.[65]

Current developments such as an increase in departmental size and in the number of courses offered should point up the decline of pure liberal education. These increases make it difficult to achieve any unity or even significant sharing of educational experiences in the undergraduate curriculum. If general degree requirements become extensive, requests to waiver some of these requirements are soon made by certain departments. When this happens there begins to

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[61]C. Easton Rothwell, "The Reaffirmation of Liberal Education," in Current Issues in Higher Educ. (Washington, D.C.: Assoc. for Higher Education, 1964) p. 45.

[62]Russell I. Thackrey, "National Organization in Higher Education," in Emerging Patterns in American Higher Education, edited by Logan Wilson (Washington, D.C.: The American Council on Education, 1967), p. 245.

[63]Logan Wilson, "Form and Function in American Higher Education," in Emerging Patterns in American Higher Education, edited by Logan Wilson (Washington, D.C.: The American Council on Education, 1967), p. 31.

[64]Ibid., p. 31-32.

[65]Ibid., p. 32.

be a tendency to set up a common but more limited set of requirements for all curricula.[66] There should be a general rule in this regard that states that no department in a liberal arts college can afford to offer approximately one and one-half times the number of courses actually required for a major. This allows ample breadth for student individual differences yet keeps the number of courses within manageable proportions.[67]

One way of breaking down departmentalization in order to provide a somewhat broader general education or interdisciplinary course, states Paul Dressel, is to introduce the divisional organization to the liberal arts college.[68] At most colleges the student is required to take specific courses; and he is required to complete a major. Also, the department, as the primary unit in the college, has tended to detach the faculty from advising students on matters other than selection of courses in their own department.[69]

DeVane suggests that with careful planning the curriculum could be made broader and at the same time more useful in itself or as a base for advanced work than it now is.[70] When such a functional and rational curriculum is designed with flexibility and concern for the wide range of abilities, the proper choice of its component courses will be an easy matter. Such a curriculum will find acceptance only if a willingness is shown by vested interest groups to yield some of their departmental sovereignty.[71]

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[66]Dressel, The Undergraduate Curriculum in Higher Education, p. 42-43.

[67]Mayhew, The Smaller Liberal Arts College, p. 52-53.

[68]Dressel, The Undergraduate Curriculum in Higher Education, p. 44-45.

[69]Ibid., p. 63.

[70]DeVane, "The College of Liberal Arts," p. 10.

[71]Ibid.

Rothwell states further that one of the most debilitating forces with respect to sound liberal education is the extent to which some institutions have permitted the liberal arts curriculum to become obscured in "Junglelike" course multiplication and diluted by course profusion that serves the ends of special interest groups without regard to the qualities of interrelationship and wholeness that are essential to a sound liberal learning program.[72] This view is reinforced by Mayhew who has been moved to state that the unity and integrity of the liberal arts college have become diffused and distorted in its effect. This distortion is reflected by the amazing multiplicity of courses and the specialization of the arts and sciences far beyond the needs of undergraduates. This is true to such a degree that it is commonplace to find departments in liberal arts colleges offering two and three times as many credit hours of work as required for majors in the subject.[73] Thus courses which duplicate or overlap and courses containing materials of short-lived significance waste valuable time.[74] Also because of the current rate of knowledge multiplication, the new liberal learning cannot aspire to all-inclusiveness.[75] Consequently, the battle against over-specialization, observes Joseph Axelrod, should continue.[76]

Course proliferation can assume many forms. The types that are frequently noted reflect either slight variations in course content to satisfy the whims of other departments, slight variations in prerequisites of several courses in

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[72]Rothwell, "The Reaffirmation of Liberal Education," p. 45.

[73]Mayhew, The Smaller Liberal Arts College, p. 36.

[74]Dressel, "A Look at New Curriculum Models for Undergraduate Education," p. 144.

[75]Mayhew, Higher Education in the Revolutionary Decades, p. 393.

[76]Axelrod, "The Undergraduate Curriculum and Instutitional Goals: An Exploration of Means and Ends," p. 128.

the same department to accomodate students with differing backgrounds, duplicating and overlapping courses in different departments, courses which are unduly narrow and specialized at the undergraduate level, and courses which are unduly elementary or entirely inappropriate for the college level.[77]

Clarence H. Faust feels that when one turns to the liberal arts curriculum when considering the dynamic changes continually taking place within the American community, he is very often disappointed to find that the structure of the curriculum reflects the history of the departmental disciplines and the organization of the graduate schools as of several generations ago. It seems that it is assumed that all things that are known can be made to fit neatly within departmental compartments. The organization of the curriculum, its courses, and the subject area dealt with by these courses are not determined by the urgent realities of the world but rather by the internal evolution of the academic disciplines themselves.[78]

Dressel and DeLisle go on to state more specifically that institutional change as a result of faculty interests, publicity, institutional and departmental prestige, opportunism, and response to external or internal pressures has specifically come about much more frequently than change due to qualitative deliberation based upon educational goals, social needs, and the abilities and goals of students.[79]

Lewis Mayhew, along these lines, is of the opinion that the liberal arts curriculum is an extraordinarily effective demonstration of cultural lag.

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[77]Dressel, "The Undergraduate Curriculum in Higher Education," p. 61-62.

[78]Faust, "Specialization and Liberal Arts," p. 48.

[79]Dressel and DeLisle, Undergradaute Curriculum Trends, p. 2.

Practitioners of academic subjects struggle for years to make their subject areas respectable enough for inclusion within the college curriculum. Once this is achieved these subjects continue even though the reasons for their existence have long disappeared.[80] When one analyzes existing course offerings of a liberal arts curriculum, it is discovered that there are clearly defined parts of the curriculum which should be eradicated for the good of the entire organism.[81]

Paul Dressel suggests a number of curricular generalizations that have emerged. He states that in the short run colleges may resist external demands for curricular change but in the long run the program of the college tends to be molded largely by the demands of the supporting clientele. Occupational specialties seem to find a degree of prestige associated with college curricula identified as being preparatory to their respective fields. Thus, the curriculum tends to expand and this expansion furthers the blending of vocational and liberal educational goals. The increase in departmental size reinforces the pattern of the course and credit concept to such an extent that professors and students alike increasingly tend to see the course as an end in itself rather than one of the components out of which the total curricular experience is built.[82] In later work, Dressel states further that there is the tendency for each departmental faculty to concentrate within its own discipline and this tends to eliminate any opportunity for the student to integrate or interrelate his knowledge of several disciplines.[83]

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[80]Mayhew, The Smaller Liberal Arts College, p. 43.

[81]Ibid., p. 53.

[82]Dressel, The Undergraduate Curriculum in Higher Education, p. 1-8.

[83]Dressel, "A Look at New Curriculum Models for Undergraduate Education," p. 144.

Although much lip service is being given to the concept of diversity, remarks Logan Wilson, there is still the indiscriminate trend toward initiating the prestigious model of the university to such an extent that pressures have been built up that call for the conversion of junior colleges into senior colleges; to have four-year institutions add graduate-level work; and to have universities expand into endless horizontal directions. Consequently, unit costs rise, quality gets diluted, and shared objectives are forgotten.[84]

An interesting point is raised by Dressel as he observes that the quality of any undergraduate program depends, along with the courses and curriculum requirements, on the instruction and advising function of the faculty. Rigidly defined curricula deprive the student and his advisors of the opportunity of seeing an individual program take form as a result of thinking through the significance of the entire undergraduate program.[85]

As a solution, states Kirk, the liberal arts college should reduce the elective feature of the curriculum to a minimum since the undergraduate is not ordinarily yet capable of judging with discretion what his course of studies ought to be.[86] Service and remedial courses, adds Michael, should not be a part of the college curriculum. Too many colleges offer coursework that is repetitive.[87]

Jacques Barzun, along the same line, feels that in some ways too much goes on in our universities while at the same time, not enough. Most universities

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[84]Wilson, "Form and Function in American Higher Education," p. 4.

[85]Dressel, The Undergraduate Curriculum in Higher Education, p. 70-71.

[86]Kirk, "American Colleges: A Proposal for Reform," p. 112.

[87]Michael, "How Can the Undergraduate College Best Meet Curricular Pressures from Graduate and Professional Schools and from New Developments in Secondary Education," p. 75.

offer too many courses at an insufficient density of instruction. He urges sobriety in the curriculum in terms of abandoning the notion of "coverage" being the goal of the college department.[88] Kirk reinforces this notion when he remarks that the liberal arts college should turn away from "survey courses," "general education," and similar substitutes for real intellectual discipline.[89]

Dressel states further that as long as the number of vocational and subvocational fields increases there will be a continuation of course and curriculum proliferation. This can result from departmental competition and may result in insufficient attention and emphasis on instruction and academic advising.[90] College curricular requirements combined with the "cafeteria pattern" of course offerings makes proper sequential planning nearly impossible for a majority of the students. This lack of course offerings predicated upon narrow interests engender student frustration when an attempt is made to devise a program based upon the broad, liberal arts concept.[91]

It should be noted that any effort to add new dimensions to liberal learning must be done at the same time that the college is being asked to cope with great increases in knowledge in all fields.[92] Vested interest groups or individuals in the course-credit structure may serve to destroy the attempts of curricular reorganization.[93]

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[88]Jacques Barzun, The American University (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) p. 249.

[89]Kirk, "American Colleges: A Proposal for Reform," p. 111.

[90]Dressel, The Undergraduate Curriculum in Higher Education, p. 55-56.

[91]Ibid., p. 56-57.

[92]Mayhew, Higher Education in the Revolutionary Decades, p. 392.

[93]Dressel, "A Look at New Curriculum Models for Undergraduate Education," p. 143.

John Corson is of the opinion that the characteristics of the dispersion of decision-making authority, the autonomy of departments, freedom from hierarchical direction, and commitment of scholars to their disciplines, constitute a set of antibodies which actually serve to guard an academic program and faculty against educational evolution to such an extent as to discourage the creative adaptation to a changing society.[94]

W. Allen Wallis feels, accordingly, that the current trend toward interdisciplinary curriculum programs poses a threat to the traditional decentralization of the university. Such interdisciplinary units tend to focus upon a problem rather than on a field of knowledge. Since they encompass many distinct disciplines, they are usually not competent to make their own appointments and promotions. If they are allowed to do so, with the passage of time, the unit's quality declines with the disappearance of the original enthusiasts who happened to represent an unusual combination of abilities. Thus a curriculum so encumbered would have the tendency of moving in its decision-making role toward some central administrative authority.[95]

Since the unique condition of our century and our society demand a restoration of liberal learning,[96] the time for restoration is favorable now if only the people who control college policy can perceive the present opportunity.[97]

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[94]Corson, The Governance of Colleges and Universities, p. 174.

[95]W. Allen Wallis, "Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in University Organization," in The Contemporary University: U.S.A., edited by Robert S. Morison (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1966), p. 44-45.

[96]Kirk, "American Colleges: A Proposal for Reform," p. 106-107.

[97]Ibid., p. 107.

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